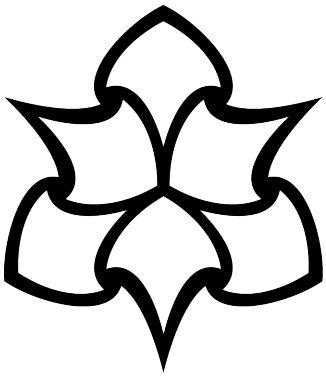

Aidan Arrowsmith（Manchester Metropolitan University):

Angles on Aran: constructing connection in the work of J.M. Synge, Robert Flaherty and Sean Scully

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Corresponding author:

Dr Aidan Arrowsmith, Department of English, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester M15 6LL, UK.

a.arrowsmith@mmu.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on three Irish-diasporic representations of the Aran Islands, and is innovative in analysing all three in the light of recent cultural theory, especially around postmemory and postmodernity. In particular, the paintings and photographs of Irish-British artist Sean Scully, especially *Walls of Aran* (2007), are given a first appraisal in this light. Further angles on Aran, and contexts for Scully's work, are provided by *Man of Aran* by Irish-American filmmaker Robert Flaherty (1934), and the photographic and literary representations of Aran produced by Anglo-Irish Ascendancy writer J.M. Synge between 1898 and 1902. The works are analysed in relation to a tradition of colonialist and nationalist primitivism and the essay builds a picture of diasporic romanticism that spans three quite different historical moments.

KEYWORDS

diaspora, nostalgia, authenticity, identity, connectedness, Synge, Flaherty, Scully

Angles on Aran: constructing connection in the work of J.M. Synge, Robert Flaherty and Sean Scully

In 2007, the Irish-born, British-raised and American-based artist Sean Scully published a book of images called *Walls of Aran.* The works contained in the book are mainly photographs of the Aran Islands – the iconic location off Ireland's west coast, which is associated in Irish nationalist discourse with authentic Irishness. Scully's images in the book are strongly related to the abstract paintings for which he has become best known, and which nowadays command fees into the millions of dollars. In this essay, I investigate the significance of diasporic representations of the Aran landscape by focusing on three different moments. Using Scully's work as a starting point, I trace the context of the Aran images backwards in two directions: back through Scully's own earlier paintings asking why a painter who is primarily associated with urban modernism is so drawn to rural Ireland and specifically to Aran; and also back through previous influential representations of the Aran Islands that have emanated from other corners of the Irish diaspora. These are firstly, J.M. Synge's photographs, taken on the Aran Islands between 1898 and 1902; and, secondly, Robert Flaherty's well-known 'documentary' film *Man of Aran* (1934). Read together, these texts illustrate the ways in which the diasporic fantasy of authentic Irishness has evolved in dialogue with different contexts of production. They map a search for authenticity and connection that becomes more concentrated from the modernism of Synge to the displacements of postmodernity that underlie the work of Scully.

I

Since the 1970s, Sean Scully's abstract works have been notable for a marked absence of narrative form at the same time as they seem consistently to allude to the real world. As Sue Hubbard has argued, 'The absence of narrative and lack of possibility for the projection of language into the visual domain resulted in a space of aesthetic purity. The predominant mode of these works is one of attentive silence'.[1] The echo of Mondrian and minimalism is certainly evident in the paintings of the 1970s but, despite their abstraction and 'silence', Scully's work has always, and increasingly, conveyed the external world. Architecture, and especially the urban landscape is a constant allusion both in the paintings and also in the way that the artist talks about them. The blocks of colour that constitute the 'Scully aesthetic' are called 'bricks' by the artist. Likewise, the words 'wall' and 'window' recur in the titles of the works (for example 'White Window, 1988'),[2] and indeed this architectural language chimes with the narrative that Scully constructs around himself, in which he presents himself as an artisan --a builder of paintings. That process of construction is apparent in the finished works, which are often three-dimensional in terms of the picture plane. 'Molloy, 1984', for example, is typical and features obviously bolted-on sections and cut-outs that Scully refers to as 'windows'.

Fig. 1. Sean Scully, *Molloy* (1984).

Hubbard's observation also underplays the extent to which narrative is a key feature of Scully's project. On one level, the paintings are part of a performance of self, or a self-creation, and Scully's art and interviews often seem centrally concerned with a search for identity. In conversation, he regularly emphasises his 'Irishness' and associates it with a set of tropes familiar from Irish diasporic writings, such as those of Frank McCourt. When Scully was interviewed by *Irish Times* writer Laurence Mackin, 'he introduce[d] himself as "Sean Scully from Inchicore"', where he was born before moving

to England at the age of four', and then explicitly namechecks McCourt's best-known text:

> The way we lived was exactly like *Angela's Ashes* … My father was unemployed. We had to live with relatives at their mercy. It was virtually impossible. I had to have the determination of Hannibal … and of course I came from a crime-riddled culture. A lot of my friends were in prison; some were dead. … [M]y life is like a fairy story. It really is; it's cinematic … I think I did it by the narrowest of margins.[3]

Even allowing for a degree of irony that may not be captured fully in print, Scully's aim seems clearly to identify himself with a particular set of origins, some of which he has transcended (the violence and poverty of working-class life), and some of which he seems to want to reconnect with (Ireland and Irishness). His artwork may appear to function as a vehicle for a desired unity with a wholeness that is perceived to have been lost, but the paintings offer a sophisticated text, functioning to suggest something of the complexity of diasporic identity. They are not so much narrative in form as about the desire for narrative, evoking a desire for connection that is unfulfilled. Walls dominate the work in more ways than one. In 'A Bedroom in Venice' (1988), bricks fill the picture frame and offer no glimpse through into a beyond of connectedness or liberation. The paintings conjure an emotional desire for that beyond, but depict obstacles instead. If not bricks, then blocked doorways as in 'London Door White' (2000). The urban world that seems to form a foundational context for much of Scully's painting in this period

appears to be one of alienation and disconnection from something authentic that lies in a liberated beyond.

Such alienation is something that Scully sees reinforced by an intellectual environment dominated by what he calls 'deconstruction', from which he distinguishes himself by identifying as a 'reconstructivist'. His response to the modern environment is to enact a search for connection with the 'authenticity' that has seemingly been lost: 'As the world has become more technological, a human need for mystery and the individually authentic experience has become more desperate'.[4] The echo of commentators on modernity and postmodernity is strong. Jean Baudrillard, for example, refers to the desire for authenticity generated by the homogenizing forces of global capitalism as a 'panic-stricken production of the real and the referential'.[5] And yet the same dynamic is detectable in the anthropology of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, as we will see in relation to the work of J.M. Synge. Writing in 1915, Georg Lukács refers to the condition of modern societies as one of 'transcendental homelessness',[6] and this modern condition is seen to have generated a desire for the primitive that shaped the ethnography of the period. For Marianna Torgovnick, the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss is driven by precisely this 'transcendental homelessness' – his status as an exile both literally (from France) and metaphorically ('an alienation from modernity which produces "filth" that chokes almost every corner of the globe'.[7])

In the same way, Scully's paintings record exactly this desire for wholeness and connectedness in an environment of endless deferral. They record the endeavour to create unity out of contradiction – a manoeuvre that might be seen as classically modernist and typically diasporic. The paintings evoke the desire to produce a whole out of the disparate and clashing elements that characterise the apparent emptiness of diasporic identity. The attendant tensions and contradictions are integral to the form of Scully's paintings such as 'Floating Grey Wall' (2002), in their clashing surfaces and planes, the inclusion of bolted-on inserts and cut-out sections, and also the tension between their architectural rationality and Scully's expressive, emotive brushwork. The title of the 'Union' series of paintings seems to indicate that target of harmony formed from such disparate elements. In works such as 'Union Grey' and 'Union Black' (1994), two different patternings and/or colour schemes are set directly against one another in a single picture plane. Here as in other works, that juxtaposition of patternings can appear as an allusion to national identity categories because of the strong resemblance to national flags. In fact, the paintings look like a cobbling together of different national standards, an encapsulation of the diasporic experience, perhaps; and, in Scully's words, his work is indeed about the 'impurity' of diasporic identities and the possibilities presented by that hybridisation: 'You have to mix things from different refined cultures to get something raw, to make it go again'.[8]

The key symbol of wholeness and authenticity to which Scully's work progressively alludes is Ireland, and *Walls of Aran* appears as his most overt negotiation

of Irishness. In the words of the historian Pierre Nora, the emptiness that is the reported experience of postmodern, diasporic space has meant that 'a kind of tidal wave of memorial concerns … has broken over the world, everywhere establishing close ties between respect for the past –whether real or imaginary— and the sense of belonging, collective consciousness and individual self-awareness, memory and identity'.[9] Amidst the conflicts and contradictions of the modern, urban, diasporic world, Scully's work consistently evokes the resulting search for connectedness –for 'mystery and authenticity' as he puts it– and Ireland represents reconnection with roots, a return to an ancestral 'home': 'London is where I learned my craft,' he says; 'Ireland is where I look for myself'.[10] The search for wholeness apparent in Scully's work derives explicitly from the in-betweenness of the diasporic condition: 'My story is … that I am a diptych, which is not all that comfortable sometimes'.[11] The use of Ireland as a signifier of authenticity has become something of a cliché of modern culture, but has a long history. Green dye in the Hudson River is one manifestation of that nostalgic drive; another is a narrative of enforced exile historically, which drives a desire for potential belonging in the future, and this discourse has been hugely influential in the construction of dominant ideas of Irishness since the nineteenth century. The Romantic pastoral, located as the authenticity from which the Irish people (both at home and abroad) have been exiled as a result of British colonisation, is the central trope of this diasporic discourse, and functions as a timeless, utopian space that salves the contradictions of diasporic exile. In the contemporary, popular imagination Ireland serves as a convenient signifier of home, rootedness and authenticity, as Diane Negra has shown:

> [these days] Irishness … has been made compatible with the project of fantasy transcendence of the alienating effects of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century culture. In many of its fictions the warmth of ethnic familial intimacy takes over from the more distant sociality of corporate culture'.[12]

Several of Scully's paintings refer explicitly to Ireland or to Irish literary works: 'Murphy' (1984), for example, shares its title with Samuel Beckett's novel, *Murphy* (1934), which concerns an Irish emigrant in London. 'For decades', Scully has said, 'I never used green in a picture, and suddenly I'm using it all the time. But I'm really not conscious of making those decisions'.[13] For Dorothy Walker, the tight grids of Scully's paintings suggest 'Celtic interlacing, layered linearity in a dynamic large-scale version of Early Christian graphic art'.[14] In 1994, Scully produced the painting 'Irelande' (1994), which, perhaps paradoxically, came to be used on a French postage stamp. Once again, the image seems to question national identity rather than to confirm it: the painting is titled for one nation state but carries the name of another alongside it on the stamp (that being 'Republique Francaise' - ironically the name of the place where the very idea of the nation state originated). This work uses a flag-like, chequerboard patterning of yellow and black, which is a recurrent colour combination. Yellow functions as a particularly significant colour because, according to Scully, it carries a 'life-affirming charge' and 'assert[s] my connection to the natural world'.[15] However, that yellow/black patterning is interrupted by a different and contradictory 'flag', whose presence disrupts any idea of a homogenous national identity, and so the painting seems once again positively to

affirm the legitimate place of (diasporic) difference and hybridity within a national whole.

A stronger claim on Irishness, but one which retains that sense of ambivalence about national identity, was made in 2003 (with a project that also gave full expression to Scully's self-identification as a construction worker). Scully built an actual wall at the University of Limerick, measuring one hundred feet long, ten feet high, seven and a half feet thick, and consisting of 480 stone blocks, each measuring 2' 6", and stacked three wide, four high, and forty long. The stones are alternately black Chinese basalt and white Portuguese limestone, and together they form a giant chequerboard. The work is entitled *Crann Soilse,* which translates from Irish as 'Wall of Light'.[16] Scully talks of the wall explicitly in terms of national identity, as a whole consisting of elements of different origin:

> Nationalism for me carries a lot of problems … if one is so invested in one's own little cultural syntax. I am very fond of the idea of bringing these stones together from different parts of the world, in a sense forcing them together. Placing them into perfectly democratic relationships of black and white: the white [stones] from Portugal, the black from China.[17]

Fig 2. Sean Scully, ‘Wall of Light Tara’, 2000.

Similar themes are suggested by the paintings that Scully produced under the ‘Wall of Light’ title. The emphasis is again on the wall as an obstacle to the pursuit of harmony and authenticity. ‘Wall of Light Tara’ (2000) presents the clashes and tensions of diasporic modernity in the familiar patterning of conflicting horizontals and verticals, and Scully has explained this contrast in figurative terms: the horizontals evoke the eternal horizon – they are nature, related to the experience of time and memory, and they imply both potential and limits. If the horizontals are nature, then the verticals are explained as figures, humanity. They are powerful and assertive but also impermanent,

and the human's relationship to nature is a key concern throughout Scully's work. The allusion to Tara in this work is significant given its historical association with Irish authenticity. The Hill of Tara, in Co. Meath, Ireland, is a rural, archaeological site that has accumulated a huge amount of historical significance since the Neolithic era, not least as the seat of the High Kings of Ireland. During the iconic 1798 rising of the United Irishmen, it was the scene of the Battle of Tara Hill, during which 4000 United Irishmen fought against, and were defeated by, the British military; and in 1843, 'the Liberator' Daniel O'Connell addressed around one million people in this place, arguing against the Act of Union, and in support of Catholic Emancipation and the restoration of the Irish Parliament. According to Paul Muldoon, 'This location was chosen by O'Connell precisely because of its profound significance in the Irish psyche'.[18] But Scully's painting emphasises its own opacity – the impossibility of connecting with that past and its significance. The surface of the painting is rough, drawing attention to itself; the form is jarring and contradictory, consisting of antagonistic horizontal and vertical bricks that are arranged into irregular squares. The colour scheme of black, white and grey stripes is set off by a few bricks of gold in varying shades and, far from evoking the world of nature that is associated with Tara, the painting suggests the greyness of urban existence. Indeed, David Carrier reports that the painting was originally made during a period that Scully spent in Ireland, but 'was repainted with more melancholic colors when he returned to New York six months later'.[19] The human's relationship to the natural landscape, allegedly indicated by the horizontals and verticals, is unfulfilled, and

the painting seems only to evoke the frustrated desire of the dislocated diasporian to connect from a distance with the past and with authentic Irishness.

The exploration of Irishness that emerges in Scully's work is most intriguing in his photographs of the Aran Islands, whose rural, pre-modern landscape and peasant inhabitants have been fetishised consistently over a long period, as a benchmark of authentic Irishness.[20] However, the different form of these works seems to place them in an alternative relationship to the obstacles discussed above. Once again, they stand as a record of the diasporic search for authenticity, but here we are shown an external landscape transformed into the architectural Scully aesthetic. These images must be regarded in an historical context that includes the colonisation that was supported by anthropologists who observed, described and depicted Aran in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Likewise the Irish Revivalist Nationalists, who aimed to resist that colonial discourse, often repeated the same colonial tropes. Before returning to Scully's work to read the Aran images more closely, I will first contextualise these photographs by examining two important artistic precursors that derive from this historical and anthropological context – namely, the representations of Aran produced in the early decades of the 20th century by John Millington Synge and Robert Flaherty respectively.

II

Perhaps the most notable visual context for Scully's Aran photographs is the work of J.M. Synge, the Anglo-Irish playwright and central figure in the Irish Literary Revival. In Synge's writing and photography, a significant aesthetic and ideological benchmark is set for Scully as the works capture the same problematical desire for connection of the distanced outsider with the apparent authenticity of the Aran landscape and people.

Synge made lengthy visits to the Aran islands between 1898 and 1902, and produced a journal (published in 1907 as *The Aran Islands)* and a set of photographs. Like Scully, Synge was an outsider, and the desire for belonging is a central element in his work. Synge was an Anglo-Irishman living in *fin-de-siècle* Paris, and engaging there with the modernist avant garde, notably including the new modernist anthropology that he studied at the Sorbonne. Synge's psychological distance and sense of inauthenticity was exacerbated by his class background and family history. Not only was he brought up, in Dublin, into the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy class – the Irish Aristocracy, descended from English colonial settlers, and about as far removed from the Aran Islands peasantry as it is possible to get – but also, his uncle the Reverend Alexander Synge had been a well-known Protestant missionary to the Aran Islands in the 1850s. All of this is likely to have heightened Synge's awareness of his own difference from that primitive place, his sense of the otherness of the islands and their inhabitants, and his romantic desire to close that gap.

[Fig 3. J.M. Synge, Men at sea by pier]

Thus Synge's was a different kind of exile to Scully's but generated a similarly powerful sense of exile and attraction to the otherness of Aran. That attraction is a logical part of the Revivalist nationalist political project. For Oona Frawley, Synge's relationship to the Aran Islands is comparable to Henry David Thoreau's Walden, with the natural world providing enormous significance in the construction of a national ideal: 'Even Synge's first trip was, one feels, in some way a return; for what Synge did, and what Yeats encouraged him to do, was to attempt to recover a lost Ireland, and that lost Ireland is intrinsically natural. … [T]he nostalgia is situated in nature'.[21] It is clear

from Synge's writing that the Aran Islands retained for him an all-important purity because they seemed to him to preserve a pre-colonial, pre-modern Irishness. Synge observes a 'natural link' both in the way the islanders talk (even when they are talking English), and in the way they walk. When he first wears a pair of the islanders' primitive foot coverings, called pampooties, he is, he reports, very soon able to feel the intimate sense of connectedness for which he had been searching, and this serves as an ideal both politically and personally:

> At first I threw my weight upon my heels, as one does naturally in a boot, and was a good deal bruised, but after a few hours I learned the natural walk of man … The absence of the heavy boot of Europe has preserved to these people the agile walk of the wild animal, while the general simplicity of their lives has given them many other points of physical perfection. … [T]hey seem, in a certain sense, to approach more nearly to the finer types of our aristocracies.[22]

Synge's social and political vision seems to be encoded in this analogy: the ideal is a national whole whose identity resides in the pre-modern qualities of those who remain uncorrupted by modernity. Like W.B. Yeats, Synge was intent on developing an idea of Irishness based upon an alliance of the peasantry and aristocracy, and the exclusion of the Catholic bourgeoisie whose authenticity has been corrupted as a result of buying into modern values. For Yeats, these people spent their lives 'grubbing in a greasy till'; for Synge, they were 'an ungodly ruck of fat-faced, sweaty-headed swine'.[23]

[FIG 4. J.M. Synge. Couple Standing on Slip*]*

Famously, it was Yeats who claimed the credit for Synge's decision to go to the Aran Islands – he declared that he himself had advised Synge, when they met in Paris: 'Give up Paris … Go to the Aran Islands. Live there as if you were one of the people themselves; express a life that has never found expression'.[24] The sentiment recalls the words of Karl Marx, used by Edward Said as an epigraph for *Orientalism* in order to illustrate the depth of penetration of the notion of a 'civilising mission' underlying imperialism –'They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented'[25]— and there is a clear Orientalism, or more precisely Celticism, in Synge's visits to, and representation of, the Aran Islands. Indeed, Synge's work must be seen in relation to a anthropological discourse about the Aran Islands that dates back through the 19th Century and includes the work of A.C. Haddon and C.R. Browne, and before them John Beddow and George Petrie, who is mentioned in Synge's Aran Islands narrative by one of the islanders.[26] That anthropological discourse was based on Victorian racialism and fed into Matthew Arnold's Celticism. As can be seen in Haddon and Browne's description of the Aran Islanders, peasant culture is equated not only with nature but with purity:

> a handsome, courteous, and amiable people. Whatever may be said of the advantages of a mixture of races, I cannot discern anything save what makes in favour of these people of the pure ancient stock, when I compare them with the mixed populations of districts on the mainland.[27]

Synge repeats this anthropological idealisation of the people and landscape of Aran and, in a manoeuvre that we might, with Erwin Panofsky, call 'hard primitivist', may even extend to a romanticisation of poverty.[28] On the islands, Synge reported for the *Manchester Guardian* in 1905, 'nearly everyone is interesting and attractive', and he expressed

> a dread of any reform that would tend to lessen their individuality rather than any very real hope of improving their well-being. One feels then ... that it is part of the misfortune of Ireland that nearly all the characteristics which give colour and attractiveness to Irish life are bound up with a social contradiction that is near to penury.[29]

Somehow, for Synge (and in a trope that seems to be echoed much later in the self-fashionings of Frank McCourt), it is harshness and poverty that appears to guarantee Irish authenticity -- by contrast with the mainland, which is corrupted already by bourgeois modernity.

[FIG 5. Islandman on shoreline]

And yet, while Yeats's words implore Synge not only to observe and represent these 'Others' and their difference, they also encourage him to dissolve those differences – 'as if you were one of the people themselves'— and this chimes with a more personal desire for connection and for the romantic rootedness that Aran seems to represent in the work of generations of visiting writers and artists, right up to Scully. On one hand, then, Synge pursues in his work the ethnographic detachment of the objective observer; on the other, he is the alienated Anglo-Irish exile desperate to connect. And that ambivalence is evident in the photographs that he took on the islands

between 1898 and 1902. The islanders appear not merely *in* the landscape but seem to be *of* it – at one with the land. The islandman standing by the shore has his back turned to the photographer, and Synge's location in photographs such as these is that of the detached observer, the anthropologist reporting on the grandeur of a primitivism that contrasts so markedly with capitalist modernity.

[FIG 6. J.M. Synge, Two women by wall)]

The two Aran women shown in this photograph appear to be working the land, possibly collecting seaweed and depositing it in the fields to make fertiliser. This is a crucial activity on the islands where the limestone landscape retains no soil, which

means that fields must be manufactured by excavating the solid limestone pavement and filling the hollow with fertile seaweed, and protected by stone walls built from excavated stone. Synge's imagery in the picture, showing one younger and one older woman, invokes the traditional female icon of Ireland, Cathleen ni Houlihan –Mother Ireland– who appears in Yeats and Lady Gregory's play of that same name as both a poor old woman (the Sean-Bhean bhocht) and a young woman (a beautiful young queen).[30] The intimate connection between the women and the land is suggested by the merging of their traditional clothing into the shadows at the base of the wall, so that they seem to be at one with the landscape. In this it prefigures work such as that of Romantic nationalist painter Paul Henry, whose idealised landscapes did much to cement the Irish pastoral trope. His painting of 1912, *The Potato Diggers,* is a particularly interesting comparison: as David Lloyd has argued, Henry shows his two female subjects in this painting as national icons because they are connected with the land that they work.[31]

[FIG 7. J.M. Synge, Two men by wall]

But Synge's images seem to acknowledge the complicated location he must take in relation to his subjects. The writer and cartographer Tim Robinson notes the way that Synge's camera seems to 'turn itself back to front', and to 'photograph the artist':

> Synge's sitters . . . do not confront the camera, they present themselves to it frankly and trustingly. And that is the stance of Synge himself in relation to the countryfolk he interprets in his own image. He looks at them with exactly the look of natural human curiosity and unsentimental sympathy they reflect towards him. Modest self-respect and respect for the mystery of personal

> identity are the qualities exchanged between him and his subject, captured by the strange chemistry of photography.[32]

However, Synge is certainly not the objective observer that the ethnography of the period aims to construct. Indeed, what is striking is the distance and disconnection between artist and subject that is evoked by these photographs. As Gregory Castle argues in relation to Synge's writing in his *The Aran Islands* journal,

> Synge strove to establish himself among the Aran Islanders and managed to establish the distance proper to ethnographic observation and to write something like an ethnographic account. But this account is destabilised in ways that suggest a modernist sensibility at odds with the mode of ethnographic redemption that has been called into being as an anodyne for his sense of dissociation and alienation.[33]

The ambivalent position of the modern, Anglo-Irish exile in relation to Irish authenticity generates both an academic (Celticist) fascination with the Other, and also a powerful, emotional desire to belong. Synge was acutely aware of his outsider status, and some of this is revealed in his preface to *Playboy of the Western World* (1907) where he describes having spent time while on the Aran Islands listening through a chink in the floorboards to the 'beautiful phrases' of the servant girls in the kitchen below. For Synge, this fieldwork offers a guarantee of sorts for the authenticity of his language use in the play (albeit the play is set in Co. Mayo), but the scene also functions to emphasise his own location on the outside and to highlight his own distance from his object of analysis.

FIG 8. J.M. Synge, Wallbuilder

Synge is radically in-between. He is a modern, cultured man visiting a pre-modern world, and his work there attests to a fascination with the juxtapositions and intersections that are integral to the place and to his encounters with it. Not least, Synge is fascinated by the relationship between nature and culture and, in this image, we see a meeting point of the two in the male figure and the stone wall he has built. These icons of Aran represent an in-betweenness that is both a point of connection and also a barrier, and the image seems to accentuate Synge's own disconnection: the man's arms are folded against the photographer and his expression is one of slightly baffled

amusement. Fionna Barber recounts the background to *The Islanders of Inishmaan,* in which this same man is depicted with a younger male: 'the boy seated on the wall … wanted to be photographed in his Sunday best rather than the working clothes that Synge preferred as conveying a sense of typicality of the islander's daily existence'.[34] Again, we are reminded of the cultural and social distance that exists between the island community and those outsiders who observe them, the different conceptions of value, and the different valuations placed on Aran 'authenticity': the peasant quality that Synge so desires to capture is a quality the islanders wish to transcend. This is a difference and disconnection of which Synge was well aware: 'we remain mostly foreign to each other'.[35] Crucially, in *The Aran Islands* he steps into the frame to acknowledge that the bridge can never be properly crossed:

> In some ways these men and women seem strangely far away from me. They have the same emotions that I have, and the animals have, yet I cannot talk to them when there is much to say, more than to the dog that whines beside me in a mountain fog.[36]

Yet this distance and disconnection regenerates desire: '[I] look out in the direction of the islands. The sort of yearning I feel towards those lonely rocks is indescribably acute'.[37] In his unpublished fieldnotes, Synge is far more frank in sexualising this yearning:

> I seem shut out from the world upon this lonely rock and shut out again from the people who are on it. In these moments I am drawn to the girls of the island, for

> in even remote sexual sympathy there is an interchange of emotion that is independent of ideas.[38]

The ethnographic, documentary quality of Synge's work is fundamentally subverted by a subjective desire for the other. The 'autoethnographic expressiveness' that Gregory Castle detects in Synge's writings is a form of self-fashioning in which his desire for the otherness that he observes on the Aran Islands salves to some extent his alienation as an Anglo-Irish Ascendancy exile. The scientific quality of anthropology 'salves secret wounds,' according to Marianna Torgovnick. '[P]rimitive societies or the general idea of the primitive becomes a place to project feelings about the present and to draw blueprints of the future'.[39] It is an apparent objectivity that is driven by the deepest desires for belonging and connection. In Synge's case, his self-conscious, ambivalent representations of the Aran Islands are 'deeply rooted in a desire for a meaningful and unambiguous Irish identity',[40] as Castle puts it, and that same desire seems to underpin the Aran images made by Sean Scully.

III

For Synge, cultural tourism on the Aran Islands served, or was designed to serve, a function containing both the political and personal and, at root, Aran became a sign of potential connectedness – the possibility that the alienation of the modern, Anglo-Irish exile might be appeased. And yet, Synge's writing and photographs are cut through by ambivalence and actually function otherwise, to highlight the unbridgeable distance

between observer and observed, as well as between reality and romantic ideal: 'I felt that this little corner on the face of the world, and the people who live in it, have a peace and dignity from which we are shut for ever'.[41] Thirty years later, *Man of Aran* (1934) by the Irish-American filmmaker Robert Flaherty presents Aran in ways that are comparable to Synge but which differ in crucial ways. Having discussed Synge as one key context for Scully's Aran images, their aesthetic and their ideal of connectedness, I shall now explore this second context before returning to Scully. Flaherty is working out of a very different, Irish American context but shares with Synge a fascination with primitivism and this shapes fundamentally the highly influential representations of Aran produced by both. However, their works communicate very different approaches to the question of authenticity and connectedness.

In *Man of Aran,* Flaherty offers the audience his characteristic documentary naturalism – an apparently objective (and thus 'authentic') presentation of the human being in its environment. The film appears as documentary footage of the noble savage inhabiting the islands, living there in a state of nature. Indeed, Flaherty –the so-called father of documentary filmmaking—was, in this period, embarked on a project to document on film the lives of the 'natives' across the world, flagging the threat posed to them from the spread of modernity and capitalism. He made documentaries about the Canadian arctic, Polynesia and the South Seas, and, in 1934, Ireland. Like Synge's work, Flaherty's work knits with the extant anthropological discourse.

In *Man of Aran,* the islanders are peculiarly well-equipped, seemingly by way of natural selection, to cope with the forces of nature that are an inescapable, sublime presence in their lives. Their harsh existence on the islands is figured as a constant battle with a natural world with which, nonetheless, the people are at one. Flaherty captures the human living, as stated in one of the film's captions, with 'one of the most gigantic seas in the world … fight[ing] for his existence, bare though it may be. It is a fight from which he will have no respite until the end of his indomitable days or until he meets his master – the sea'.[42] The Romanticism is clear, but while the claimed objectivity of this ethnography is obviously corrupted, Flaherty does not follow Synge by stepping into the frame, and the veneer of authenticity is left untroubled.

And yet, the subjective dimension to this particular film is clear. It is tempting to regard *Man of Aran* as a personal addition to Flaherty's anthropological portfolio, a tracing (and reinvention) of the Flaherty family's roots. Flaherty himself claimed to be at one with this land and its inhabitants, and again the Celticism seem clear:

> It was my kind of life [on Aran]. I haven't much use for towns. I like the open air and places where they live fully and simply … The islanders [have] magnificent physiques … A charming people, hospitable and courteous. They're very intelligent, too, when you consider the kind of life they lead. Yet in many ways they are child-like – most of them believe in fairies. There's one of them, a famous storyteller known as the Fairy Cobbler, who maintains that he was stolen by the 'little folk' when he was a child, and was taught to trade by them.[43]

Likewise, the film speaks in interesting ways to its broader diasporic context and responds to commercial as well as personal concerns. Flaherty was well aware of the market potential of this image of authenticity when it was packaged and sold to the huge Irish diaspora overseas, especially Irish America during the Great Depression of the 1930s. According to Marcus Hearn, Flaherty's idea for *Man of Aran* came while speaking about the Depression with one of his fellow passengers on an Atlantic crossing: 'He said that most folks don't know what hardship is: they ought to go and live on Aran to learn about it'.[44] And the film's depiction of the vulnerability of the individual in nature is matched by a celebration of the *natural* power of the collective and thus the film arguably functions as a subtle critique of the individualism of American capitalism. Survival here *depends* on the collective. The men and women work together to mend the curraghs and, as in Synge's photographs, to compensate for the absence of any topsoil on the islands by packing the limestone floor with fertile seaweed. Indeed the importance and power of communal work on the islands was a key observation of Haddon and Browne's 'Ethnography of the Aran Islands' in the 1890s, as Castle points out.[45] This primitivist notion of authentic Ireland was thus made by, and for, the diaspora. In a distinctly modern moment of (economic) hardship, Irish-American audiences might indulge in a comforting time travel back to premodernity, to the very edge of the old world, and view the lives of their ancestors. The 'pure Irishness' presented by Flaherty serves both as a case study in itself and as a pre-modern, pre-capitalist contrast to the 'over-developed' modernity back home, but the fight for survival is common to both and a kind of heroism might be projected backwards into

the audience's here and now.[46] Castle refers to 'a process of ethnographic engagement in which the observer finds an analogue for his own suffering in the people and landscape he observes'.[47]

Not only is the version of Irishness presented in the movie highly strategic, it is also fundamentally invented. To a far greater degree than Synge, Flaherty felt it necessary to enhance the authenticity of the islands and their inhabitants by heightening their primitivism. The family home featured in the film –a traditional cabin— was constructed by Flaherty's team but, rather than building it on the sheltered, eastern shore where the islanders actually live, he chose to build it on the wild, exposed, western side of the island, in order to augment their primitive authenticity. Alistair Cooke, writing in *The Listener* in 1934, described seeing the film with two men from the Aran islands: 'When they weren't howling with laughter, they mumbled with protest. Afterwards they swore that this was not Aran, that no boat would come through that storm, that Aran is not nearly so bare, that the natives haven't worn caps like that for 70 years'.[48] The fictionality of Flaherty's Aran is the subject of the 1996 play *The Cripple of Inishmaan* by Martin McDonagh, himself a second-generation Irish-Englishman. From that diasporic location, McDonagh's plays typically deconstruct the nostalgic compulsion for authenticity, and *Cripple* is set during the filming of *Man of Aran* in order thoroughly to debunk Flaherty's fictionalisation. Flaherty's climactic shark hunt scene ignores the fact that such hunting had not featured in island life for many years since all the oil needed on the islands was imported from the mainland. McDonagh's character Slippy

Helen describes *Man of Aran* as 'a pile of fecking shite'.[49] In José Lanters's words, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* 'tak[es] the notion of performativity to its logical conclusion by depicting every act as a re-enactment of no original'.[50]

No such acknowledgement of constructedness is apparent in Flaherty's film, and the result is an aestheticization of the 'bleakness and austerity' and poverty of Aran.[51] Whereas Synge steps into the frame, metaphorically, to acknowledge the impossibility and mythology of his desired connection, Flaherty purports to present documentary reality, and the influence of his particular Romantic mythology has been pronounced. Upon its release in Ireland, Flaherty's film was embraced and even adopted as an image of Irishness by the new Irish state (which had been in existence for a little over a decade at that point). According to Luke Gibbons, the Irish premiere of the film became 'a state occasion, attended by [President] Eamon de Valera and his cabinet, members of the diplomatic service and dignitaries from all walks of life, including "Dr and Mrs W.B. Yeats"'.[52] The new state was authoring a national identity based precisely around the values celebrated in these diasporic constructions of Irishness - austerity, agrarianism, anti-materialism, insularity. As Terence Brown points out, it was a fantasy that 'could only be maintained by ignoring the dismal facts of emigration, economic stagnation, individual inhibition and lack of fulfilling opportunity.'[53] This kind of denial seemed a central strategy of the government – as in 1943, when President de Valera famously urged the Irish people to 'turn aside for a moment' from their 'misery and desolation', and take refuge in his repainting of that Gaelic utopia'.[54] Another strategy, more

desperate and driven by a survival instinct, has been to create Ireland as a theme-park for Irish-American tourists looking for their roots. And indeed Flaherty's film has become a centrepiece for a new tourist industry, especially on Aran. A diasporic fantasy has been adopted as an identity, and *Man of Aran* now plays in the Árainn Heritage Centre, on Inishmore, up to six times daily.[55]

IV

Scully's representations of the Aran Islands are therefore charged with significance accrued over more than a century, and to that is added the apparent emptiness and rootlessness of 21st century globalisation. More than ever, Aran signifies authenticity, purity, nature, anti-modernity, anti-capitalism: the putative 'essence' of Irishness. For Scully, the islands are 'the way things used to be, and the way things are not any longer everywhere else'.[56] It seems important to Scully, then, that this 'essence' is represented authentically. Writing about his visit to the Aran Islands, Scully notes the tapestries hung in his hotel,

> which depicted utterly bizarre pictures of a rustic, rural, bygone Ireland … a virtual place that would be lovely Ireland. But it was seen from a Chinese perspective, since that's where the tapestries were made. We loved the thought of people in a factory in China, perhaps with a view through a grid of windows in a skyscraper, imagining and depicting, in mechanical nylon, a wistfully concocted innocence. A Yeats tower, for example, rendered in material manufactured in

> China and realised in the Chinese vision of an Ireland that may or may not have existed in the first place'.[57]

Scully's intention seems to be to draw attention to the constructed, kitsch, inauthentic version of Ireland that results from capitalist (post)modernity – 'a nylon place that is not my land', he says.[58] Implicitly, his own role is to create representations that are less 'nylon', more natural, more authentic - a depiction of a land he might call his own. As Baudrillard writes of postmodernity, 'When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity'.[59]

Fig 9. Sean Scully, Walls of Aran (Aran Suite)

In his Aran photographs, Scully focuses closely and almost exclusively on the dry stone walls that (the islands' stunning cliffs notwithstanding) constitute the main feature of the islands' flat and bleak landscape, and which are formed from the same limestone as the land itself. As we have seen, Scully's earlier work has often had much in

common with Synge's in their shared emphasis on disconnection and on the barriers to romantic fulfilment: the walls of Scully's paintings appear as completely solid edifices, stretching to the edge of the canvas and allowing no glimpse into a world beyond; and the same is true in numerous images of closed doors, which block access to an interior world of memory, the past, connectedness. But as we have seen in Synge's writing and in Flaherty's film, the Aran Islands are deemed to constitute a different level of Irish authenticity and, in interesting ways, Scully's Aran images appear to take a step beyond his earlier work and to affirm diasporic homecoming and evoke an achieved connection.

Perhaps the photographic medium itself encourages this. For Roland Barthes, photography creates a connection with the past, between viewer and object, via the medium of light:

> The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze.[60]

The interaction of light and stone is a clear preoccupation in Scully's work in this period, most notably, for example, in the aforementioned 'Wall of Light' series of paintings and sculpture, including *Crann Soilse*. And Barthes's imagined connection, carried by the medium of light, seems to be evoked strongly in Scully's photographic images of Aran's limestone walls. Not only does the photograph, according to Barthes, link the viewer,

now, to the stones, but these ancient stones themselves link back into the past, and into the fetishised land from which they were excavated. Scully's camera draws close and dwells on the textures of these ancient stones. As Scully says, the walls 'are the ground made vertical'. They are both a horizontal, which appears in his paintings as nature, the landscape itself, and also a vertical – man-made, cultural. The walls are an artform both in the sense of being artisanal (recalling Scully's sense of his own role as artist-labourer) and in the sense of being regarded as sculptures:

> I nominate them as Art because of their unremitting, austere, repetitive variety. … They are the ground made vertical, with drawing [that] is diagonal, horizontal, vertical in rhythms of silence. … [T]his sculpture is like the music of this place: austere and elemental.[61]

These sculptural walls blur the natural/cultural divide and seem also to dissolve the inside/outside dichotomy that has been a preoccupation in Scully's earlier work. Here, seemingly, the (post)modern, diasporic outsider might feel connection.

Indeed, Scully's photographs appear explicitly to express the desire to claim Aran as 'Home' because the landscape is harnessed and shaped into a distinctively 'Scullyesque', architectural aesthetic. The stones of the photographed walls are depicted in terms of the same patterning of horizontals, verticals and obliques that are familiar from the paintings Scully has made throughout his career. It is a signature style that has become almost a brand.[62] The 'Scullyesque' architecture of these 'sculptures' seems to be the point of the images and, as Torgovnick argues: 'whatever form the

primitive's hominess takes, its strangeness salves our estrangement from ourselves and our culture. … For "going home," like "going primitive," is inescapably a metaphor for the return to origins'.[63] These images convey the desire for 'home' that is the imaginary fulfilment of a 21st century, diasporic and exilic search for authenticity, but function moreover as a self-dramatisation. The photographs are a representation of the artist's desire rather than an expression of it.

Furthermore, when read in the context not only of primitivist Aran discourses, but also of Scully's earlier work, the photographs function, contra Barthes, to distance the viewer. At the level of content, the viewer is blocked out by walls that dominate the frame, as in the paintings. At the level of form, the aesthetic similarity between the photographs and paintings makes the difference of medium an important element of meaning. The slick, flat surface of the photographs contrasts markedly with the expressive and architectural physicality of the paintings, and the lack of texture in the former functions to make them seem more distancing, less authentic or 'real', than the expressive paintings. The artificiality of the photographs is also highlighted in the highly-staged composition of these images, and all of this serves, once again, to emphasise the absence of connection.

The sequencing of Scully's photographs in the *Walls of Aran* volume creates a sense of development. A space beyond the wall begins to emerge in the images and it is tempting to read this as a narrative of return to set against the 'absence of narrative'

that, for Sue Hubbard, characterises Scully's early work. Whereas those earlier paintings and photographs appear to be pursuing the natural world without success, nature seems now within reach, and the Aran photographs appear to evoke the connectedness that had previously seemed an infinitely elusive myth.[64] The book's final image presents a stone-built dwelling in full view, framed by the surrounding landscape and the ocean beyond. As Scully writes: 'the land is bounded but we are free'.[65]

And yet what is most striking, as these spaces emerge in the photographs, is the emptiness of the landscape. Unlike Paul Henry, Robert Flaherty and J.M. Synge, whose various respective modes of diasporic and exilic nationalism are emblematised by the peasant inhabitants of the land, Scully presents a depopulated landscape of ghostly remains. The walls are presented as the artistic, artisanal expressions of the Aran Islanders (it is unstated whether Scully himself has lent a helping hand), but they appear as memorials to something lost. But, while there is an elegiac tone, the effect is not one of mourning for a lost authenticity. The images speak of a traumatic history by which the Irish landscape has been depopulated over centuries and, with the intervention of the diasporic artist visible in their form and content, the photographs allude to the consequent fetishisation of that landscape by the descendants of Irish emigrants. Scully's photographs enact not the loss of authenticity but its troubling absence - the impossibility of connection. These images represent a narrative without end.

V

Scully's work is inhabited by the search for origins, connection and 'liberation' that is evident in a history of artistic and ethnographic interactions with the Aran landscape. It represents a set of diasporic fantasies of Irishness and alludes to an aesthetic ideal that serves a romantic function for the alienated, modern man. In Torgovnick's words, this is 'handling, by displacement, the series of dislocations that we call modernity and postmodernity. … Our interest in the primitive meshes thoroughly … with our passion for clearly marked and definable beginnings and endings that will make what comes between them coherent narrations'.[66] But the 'authentic Ireland' that is constructed out of these various modern or postmodern contexts offers little or no liberation – either for the frustrated subject of modernity, or more especially for the islanders. These familiar fantasies of Aran recycle a discourse of primitivism that is shared by colonial ethnography and anti-colonial nationalism, and function as part of a backward-looking ideology that trapped Ireland for the best part of the twentieth century. A cultural tourism that derives from a modern, exilic craving for authenticity, and which

celebrates under-development, serves to freeze Aran and its inhabitants in a fetishised fantasy of pre-modernity. Recalling Terence Brown's words, it is a projection that ignores 'dismal facts of emigration, economic stagnation, … and lack of fulfilling opportunity.'[67] Scully's depopulated Aran landscapes and the ghostly remains that form their most notable features evoke not only a frustrated, modern and postmodern desire for connection but also the impact upon this fetishized culture of those diasporic desires.

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

Fig. 1. Sean Scully, *Molloy* (1984).

Fig 2. Sean Scully, *Wall of Light Tara* (2000).

Fig 3. J.M. Synge. *My Wallet of Photographs: The Collected Photographs of J.M. Synge,* IE TCD MS11332_24 (Men at sea by the pier)

FIG 4. J.M. Synge, *My Wallet of Photographs: The Collected Photographs of J.M. Synge,*

IE TCD MS11332_46 (Couple Standing on Slip)

FIG 5. J.M. Synge, *My Wallet of Photographs: The Collected Photographs of J.M. Synge,*

IE TCD MS11332_44 (Islandman on shoreline)]

FIG 6. J.M. Synge, *My Wallet of Photographs: The Collected Photographs of J.M. Synge,*

IE TCD MS11332_40 (Two women by wall)

FIG 7. J.M. Synge, *My Wallet of Photographs: The Collected Photographs of J.M. Synge,*

IE TCD MS11332_29 (Two men by wall)

FIG 8. J.M. Synge, *My Wallet of Photographs: The Collected Photographs of J.M. Synge,*

IE TCD MS11332_28. (Wallbuilder)

Fig 9. Sean Scully, 'Aransuite' (2007).

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[1] Sue Hubbard, 'Sean Scully: Paintings of the 70s', *The Independent,* 2004 <http://suehubbard.com/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=42&cntnt01returnid=57> Accessed 16 April 2015.

[2] The 'wall' motif recurs throughout Scully's work in various ways. According to the architectural critic Christopher Turner, Scully has even likened his own work to Phil Spector's 'wall of sound'. Christopher Turner, 'Sean Scully', *Icon: International Design, Architecture & Culture*, 24 October 2014. http://www.iconeye.com/architecture/features/item/11151-sean-scully Accessed 20 May 2015.

[3] Sean Scully, quoted by Laurence Mackin, 'Sean Scully', *The Irish Times,* April 11 2015. << http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/sean-scully-i-don-t-lie-on-a-chaise-longue-with-a-cigarette-holder-and-a-glass-of-champagne-1.2171867>> Accessed April 15 2015.

[4] Sean Scully, quoted by David Carrier, *Sean Scully* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), p.191.

[5] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations,* translated by P. Foss *et al*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), pp.12-13.

[6] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel,* trans. A. Bostock (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1971) (1920)

[7] Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp.218-9.

[8] Sean Scully, quoted by Mackin.

[9] Pierre Nora, 'Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory', *Transit* (2002) <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2002-04-19-nora-en.html> Accessed 16 April 2015.

[10] Sean Scully, quoted by Michael Auping, 'No Longer a Wall', in *Sean Scully: Wall of Light*, edited by Stephen Bennett Phillips (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), p.31. [pp.23-37].

[11] Sean Scully, 'Diptych', in Sean Scully, *Resistance and Persistence: Selected Writings,* edited by Florence Ingleby (London: Merrell, 2006), p.50.

[12] Diane Negra, 'The New Primitives: Irishness in Recent U.S. Television', *Irish Studies Review* Vol.9, No.2 (2001), p.236.

[13] Sean Scully, quoted by Mark Lawson, 'Sean Scully: "My therapist sent me away"', *The Guardian,* 7 January 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/jan/07/sean-scully-painter-interview> Accessed 16 April 2015.

[14] Dorothy Walker, *Modern Art in Ireland,* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1997), p.102.

[15] Sean Scully, 'Conversation with Sean Scully' by Kevin Power, in Carrier, p.212.

[16] Images of Crann Soilse are available to view at http://www.publicart.ie/main/directory/directory/view/crann-saoilse-wall-of-light/1c9490fde3a0b0050518eefc9b3eb8e0/ Accessed 21 May 2015.

[17] Sean Scully, 'The Wall', in Sean Scully, *Resistance and Persistence,* p.76.

[18] Paul Muldoon, 'Erin Go Faster', *The New York Times*, 25 May 2007 << http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/25/opinion/25muldoon.html>> Accessed 16 April 2015.

[19] Carrier, p.196.

[20] Examples of Scully's Aran photographs are available to view on the artist's website: http://www.sean-scully.com/en/art/photography/230230230230Aran%7C230%7C1%7CD%7C1 Accessed 21 May 2015.

[21] Oona Frawley, 'Nature & Nostalgia is Irish Literature', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, Vol.18-19, (1998-99), p.274 [268-77].

[22] J.M. Synge, *The Aran Islands,* in *The Complete Works of J.M. Synge: Plays, Prose and Poetry,* edited by Aidan Arrowsmith (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2008), p.324.

[23] W.B. Yeats, 'September 1913', in W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1965, p.121. J.M. Synge, *The Collected Letters of John Millington Synge, Volume 2: 1907—1909,* edited by Ann Saddlemyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.116-117. Quoted by Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation*, (London: Vintage, 1996), p.488.

[24] W.B. Yeats, 'Preface to the first edition of *Well of the Saints'* (London, 1905), p.vi; reproduced in *Modern Irish Drama,* edited by John P. Harrington (New York & London: Norton, 1991), pp.452-3 [452-4]. Seamus Deane regards Yeats's claim as a myth. See Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity & Nationhood in Irish Writing since 1790*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.165.

[25] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1853), quoted by Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), unpaginated epigraph.

[26] J.M. Synge, *The Aran Islands,* in *The Complete Works of J.M. Synge,* p.310.

[27] A.C. Haddon and C.R. Browne, 'Ethnography of the Aran Islands, County Galway', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy,* Third series, Vol. 2, (1891—93), pp.773, 776, quoted by Castle, p.105.

[28] Panofsky defines 'hard primitivism' as a celebration of 'an almost subhuman existence full of terrible hardships and devoid of all comforts – in other words, as civilised life stripped of its virtues'. Erwin Panofsky, '*Et in Arcadia Ego*: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition', in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), p.297; quoted by Luke Gibbons, 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema', in *Cinema and Ireland,* by Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1987), p.200. In balance with this arguable romanticisation of poverty, Synge was also blunt in his critical documentation of the poverty in these 'congested districts' in the series of articles he wrote for the *Manchester Guardian* over the coming few years. See J.M. Synge, 'In Connemara' (1905), 'In Wicklow' (1905), and 'In West Kerry' (1907), in *The Complete Works of J.M. Synge: Plays, Prose and Poetry,* edited by Aidan Arrowsmith (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2008).

[29] J.M. Synge, *In Connemara,* in *The Complete Works of J.M. Synge,* p.190.

[30] See W.B. Yeats and Augusta Gregory, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, in *Selected Plays of W.B. Yeats*, edited by Richard Allen Cave (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), pp.19—28.

[31] David Lloyd, 'Republics of Difference: Yeats, MacGreevy, Beckett', in *Field Day Review* 1, (2005), pp.52-55 [43—67].

[32] Tim Robinson, quoted by Jem Casey, 'My Wallet of Photographs' << http://www.aran-isles.com/blog/2009/05/my-wallet-of-photographsj-m-sy.php>> Accessed 16 April 2015.
[33] Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.98.
[34] Fionna Barber, *Art in Ireland Since 1910* (London: Reaktion, 2013), p.22.
[35] J.M. Synge, unpublished fieldnotes (MS, 4385), quoted by Castle, p.114.
[36] J.M. Synge, *The Aran Islands,* in *The Complete Works of J.M. Synge,* p.364.
[37] J.M. Synge, *The Aran Islands,* in *The Complete Works of J.M. Synge,* p.22.
[38] J.M. Synge, unpublished fieldnotes (MS, 4344), quoted by Castle, p.128.
[39] Torgovnick, p.219, 244.
[40] Castle, p.101. See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).
[41] J.M. Synge, *The Aran Islands,* in *The Complete Works of J.M. Synge: Plays, Prose and Poetry*, p.409.
[42] *Man of Aran,* (dir. Robert Flaherty) (Gaumont British Picture Corporation, Ltd., 1934)
[43] Robert Flaherty, quoted by Marcus Hearn, Introduction to DVD of *Man of Aran* (DD Home Entertainment 2006), p.14.
[44] Robert Flaherty, quoted by Hearn, p.9.
[45] Castle, p.112.
[46] In the words of John Taylor, who worked on the shoot, '[Flaherty] was almost an anthropologist, in a simple nineteenth century way. You have to remember he was 48 in 1932, so he was born during the Victorian era and lived during it'. BECTU interview with John Taylor (1988), http://www.screenonline.org.uk/audio/id/945077/index.html Accessed 21 May 2015.
[47] Castle, p.110.
[48] Alaistair Cooke, *The Listener,* 1934, quoted by Hearn, p.17.
[49] Martin McDonagh, *The Cripple of Inishmaan* (London: Methuen, 1997), p.61.
[50] José Lanters, 'The Identity Politics of Martin McDonagh', in *Martin McDonagh: A Casebook,* edited by Richard Rankin Russell (London: Routledge, 2007), p.15 [pp.9—24].
[51] Luke Gibbons, 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema', in *Cinema and Ireland,* by Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1987), p.197.
[52] Luke Gibbons, 'Projecting the Nation: Cinema and Culture', in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture,* edited by Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.210 [206-224].
[53] Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-85* (London: Fontana, 1985), p.154.
[54] Eamon de Valera: 'whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be the forums of the wisdom of old age.' Eamon de Valera, 'The Undeserted Village Ireland', in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Vol.III,* edited by Seamus Deane (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1991), pp.747-48.
[55] http://www.visitaranislands.com/man.html Accessed 24 October 2006
[56] Sean Scully, 'Drawing Unto Aran', in *Walls of Aran,* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), p.124.
[57] Scully, 'Drawing Unto Aran', p.123.
[58] Scully, 'Drawing Unto Aran', p.124.
[59] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations,* translated by P. Foss *et al*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), pp.12-13.
[60] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* translated by R. Howard, (London: Vintage, 1993), pp.80—81.
[61] Scully, 'Drawing Unto Aran', p.126.
[62] Scully's pride in his brand is evident in his interview with Christopher Turner: "You can see one of my paintings from 200m and you can recognise it's mine". Christopher Turner, 'Sean Scully', *Icon: International Design, Architecture & Culture*, 24 October 2014. http://www.iconeye.com/architecture/features/item/11151-sean-scully Accessed 20 May 2015.
[63] Torgovnick, p.185.

[64] Sue Hubbard, 'Sean Scully: Paintings of the 70s', *The Independent,* 2004 <http://suehubbard.com/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=42&cntnt01returnid=57> Accessed 16 April 2015.
[65] Scully, 'Drawing Unto Aran', p.127.
[66] Torgovnick, p.245.
[67] Brown, *Ireland,* p.154.